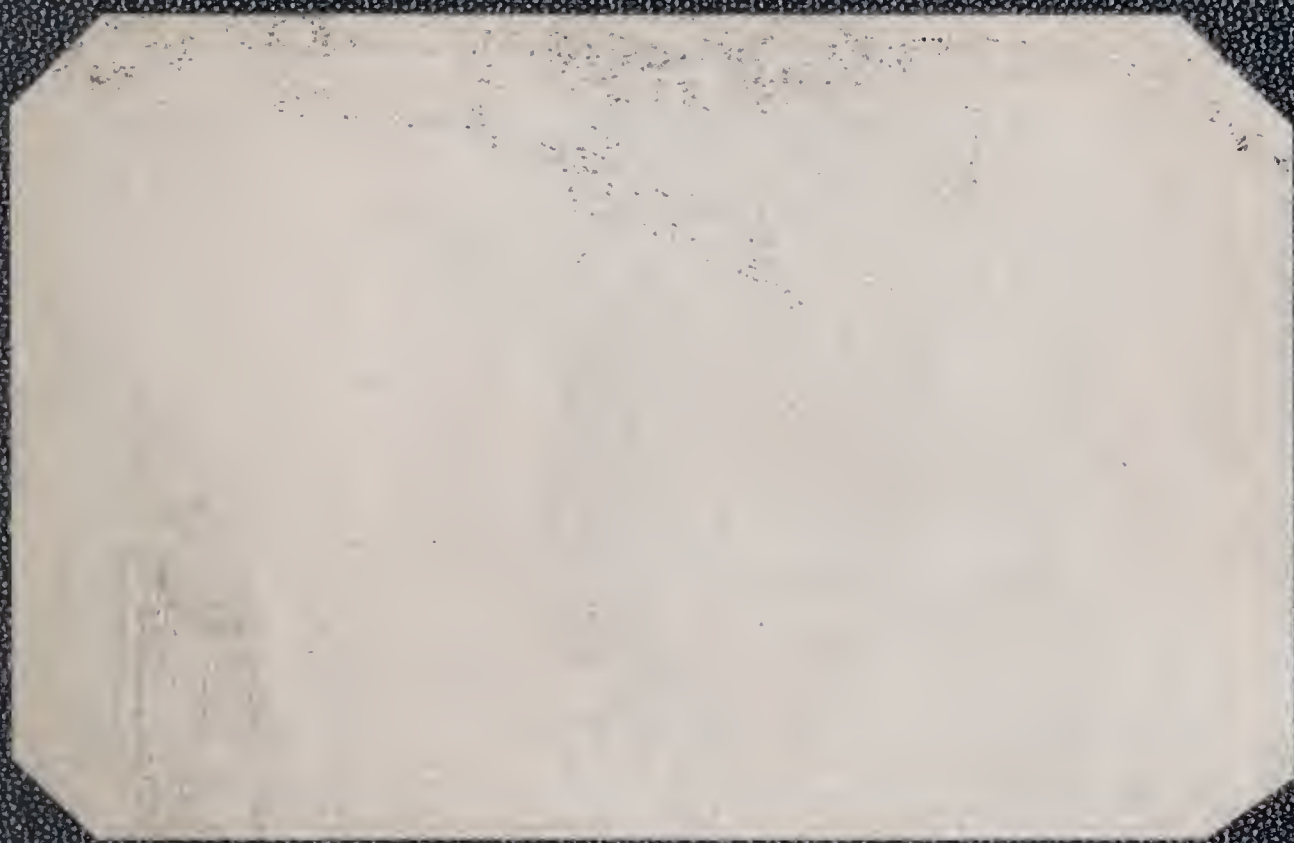


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L E T T E R

TO A

MEMBER OF CONGRESS,

IN RELATION TO

INDIAN CIVILIZATION.

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BY THE DOMESTIC SECRETARY OF THE UNITED FOREIGN
MISSIONARY SOCIETY.

Zechariah Lewis

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LETTER
TO A
MEMBER OF CONGRESS,

&c.



RESPECTED AND DEAR SIR,

HAVING understood, by a letter from Washington, that the impression has been uttered on the floor of Congress, that “Indian Civilization forms no part of the objects of Missionary Institutions,” and that “the establishments at Brainerd and Elliot are a miserable farce,” I would respectfully invite your attention, for a moment, to the following facts and remarks.

The objects of the United Foreign Missionary Society, are to civilize and christianize the American Indians ; and the Managers are convinced, from their own experience, as well as that of kindred Institutions, that each of these objects can be more easily and successfully attained, when combined, than when separately attempted. The history of eighteen centuries testifies, that no pagan nation ever became civilized to any important degree, until it had renounced its idols, and abandoned the whole train of superstitious rites connected with its idolatrous worship ; and that no one ever became evangelized without acquiring, in some measure, the arts and habits of civilized life. Whether the object, therefore, be to civilize or christianize, both must be carried on with an equal

and united effort. Under the impression of these truths, the Board, in forming their General Principles, or System of Operations, combined the two objects, as you will evidently perceive, by a perusal of the following sections :

“ *First.* At all the Missionary Stations under the care of this Board, it shall be the object to promote, not only the knowledge of christianity, but also the arts of civilized life. Besides the branches of learning taught in common schools, the boys shall be instructed in agriculture and the mechanic arts; and the girls in spinning, weaving, sewing, knitting, and household business.

“ *Second.* In every establishment, it is expedient that there be a Superintendent and an Assistant, who shall be Ministers of the Gospel; a Schoolmaster, a Farmer, a Blacksmith, a Carpenter, and such other mechanics as shall be found necessary, all of whom shall come under the general denomination of Missionaries. The number shall be increased as occasion shall require. At every station there shall be either a Physician, or a person acquainted with the practice of physic.”

There are eight other sections, all of which are conformable to the two I have quoted.

The substance of these General Principles was communicated to the public in the third Annual Report. In the same Report, it was stated, that in the Mission family which had just gone to the Osages of the Arkansas, there were two Clergymen, one Physician, two Teachers, two Farmers, a Carpenter, and a Blacksmith.

The fourth Report, in relation to the family which

went out last Spring to the Osages of the Missouri, states as follows :

“ Besides the Superintendent and Assistant, there are among the males of the family, a Minister of the Gospel, who goes out as a Teacher, with the privilege of preaching whenever his health will permit, and the circumstances of the Mission require ; a regularly educated Physician and Surgeon ; a person capable of manufacturing machinery, performing most kinds of blacksmith’s work, and teaching sacred music ; a Carpenter and Millwright, a Shoemaker, a Waggonmaker, and two Farmers. The females, collectively, are qualified to teach all the branches of industry pursued by that sex in this country ; most of them have had considerable experience in teaching common schools ; and two or three have taught in seminaries of a higher order.”

In speaking of the Mission at Tuscarora, the same report says :

“ The whole of the nation now residing at Tuscarora, have taken a decided stand in favour of the Christian Religion. They have, already, made considerable progress in acquiring the arts and habits of civilized life. Having, in a great measure, abandoned the chase as the means of subsistence ; they depend, for their support, principally upon the produce of their soil. They occupy comfortable dwellings ; and in passing through their village, you behold waggons, ploughs, and other implements of husbandry, arranged around their doors. Some of their youth have made considerable proficiency in the elementary branches of an English education. One of their young men, hopefully pious, and of promising talents, is stationed at a Seminary in this city ; and another, perhaps equally

pious and promising, at the Foreign Mission School, in Connecticut.

“From our Missionary at this station, we learn that the Indians had recently manifested more than ordinary solicitude for the general improvement of their village and their nation. Among other efforts for this object, they are preparing to erect a new Council-House and Church, of larger dimensions, and of more convenient structure, than the one they now occupy. They have already furnished all the timber and boards required for the building; and they hope to finish it early in the ensuing summer.

“A school for the children of the tribe has been taught for several years by the Missionary and his wife. As an additional Teacher, the Board have lately appointed Miss Elizabeth L. Brown, of Homer, in the county of Courtland. She will probably commence her labours in the course of the present month; and it will be her particular duty to instruct the young females of the nation in the arts of sewing, knitting, spinning and weaving.”

In relation to the Seneca station, the same report remarks:

“The property of the Board in the Seneca village, consists of two dwelling houses and a school house, together with the use, for an indefinite period, of the ground on which they are erected. It is in contemplation to build an addition to the house now occupied by Mr. Young, for the purpose of accommodating the minister, and of embodying many of the Indian children in the Missionary family. It is also in contemplation to erect a workshop within an enclosure, of sufficient extent for the deposit of boards and timber; to furnish the necessary tools; and to give to the na-

tion free access to the establishment, for the object of making and repairing their farming utensils and household furniture."

I might easily multiply these extracts; but enough have been given to show in the first place, that "*Indian Civilization*" constitutes a leading object of this Society, and one, of which the Managers can never lose sight; and in the second place, that this subject forms a prominent topic in our Annual Reports. When the last Report was written, it was not officially known to the Board that the Mission sent out to the Osages of the Arkansaw had arrived at their destined station; and the numerous family, bound to the Osages of the Missouri, had not yet embarked at Pittsburgh. Of course, no account could have been given of the progress of civilization among those tribes. But the Missions among the Tuscarora and Seneca tribes, are of longer standing; and to strangers and others who have visited them, it is a matter of surprise, that they should have made such rapid progress in laying aside their savage customs, and acquiring the habits, arts, and industry of civilized life. During the last summer, they were visited by two very respectable Gentlemen (a Physician and a Merchant) and several Ladies from Charleston, S. C. who were highly gratified with the good order of the schools, the proficiency of the scholars, and the general state of civilization and improvement among the Indians. They left behind them, for the benefit of the Mission, a handsome donation, as a testimonial of the gratification they had received; and took with them to Charleston a number of elegant specimens of penmanship from the hands of the Indian youth. While passing through this city, one of the Gentlemen called on me as the official organ of our

society, and expressed the lively sense which he and his whole party entertained of the usefulness of our operations among those tribes.

At Tuscarora there is a regularly organized Church, which contains *twenty-three* Indian communicants, whose life and conversation correspond with their religious profession. Our Missionary in speaking of this tribe, says—"On some accounts, this poor people are superior to any village of white inhabitants, with which I am acquainted. The sabbath is almost universally regarded and honoured among them. There is not a village in the State, where so large a proportion of the heads of families punctually attend the preaching of the Gospel."—Again—"There appears to be among these Indians an increasing sense of the importance of education and industry. A large proportion of the families are industrious. During the past winter, the children have been punctual in their attendance at school, and have made very encouraging progress."

The visit to Brainerd and Elliot, by a member of Congress, (as stated in the letter which has called forth these remarks,) was probably made in the infancy of that Establishment. The uniform testimony, given by the Missionaries, and by gentlemen who have occasionally visited those Stations, is of a very different character. They concur in representing those nations as making great and rapid improvement in civilization. An extract or two from the documents which first come to hand, will sufficiently support this remark. The journal of the Mission at Brainerd, under date of the 1st of November, 1820, presents the following pleasing intelligence :

“ The Council (of Indian Chiefs) have made a law

to compel parents to keep their children at school, when once entered, until they have finished their education, or to pay all expense for clothing, board, and tuition. They have also given the Superintendents of each Mission authority to take out of their schools such children as they shall think proper, and, with the consent of their parents, put them to such trades as are attached to their Missions ; and, when such children have learned a trade, they are to be furnished with a set of tools at the expense of the nation.

“ They have also divided their country into eight districts or counties ; laid a tax on the people to build a Court House in each of these counties, and appointed four Circuit Judges. The Cherokees are rapidly adopting the laws and manners of the whites. They appear to advance in civilization, just in proportion to their knowledge of the Gospel. It, therefore, becomes all, who desire the civilization of the Indians, to do what they can to send the Gospel among them.”

In the Spring of 1820, ADAM HODGSON, Esq. a distinguished merchant of Liverpool, visited Elliot and Brainerd, on a journey from Natchez on the Mississippi, to Richmond in Virginia. An account of his journey, I find in a London publication now before me, from which, I beg leave to present a few passages, that you may learn the opinion of an intelligent foreign traveller, upon the subject now in question. After mentioning his arrival at Elliot, he adds—

“ Soon after my arrival, we proceeded to the school, just as a half breed, who has taken great interest in it, was preparing to give the children ‘ a Talk,’ previous to returning home, 60 miles distant. He is a very influential Chief, and a man of comprehensive views. He first translated into Choctaw, a letter to the chil-

dren, from some benevolent friends in the North, who had sent it with a present of a box of clothes. He then gave them a long address in Choctaw.

“As soon as the school was over, the boys repaired to their agricultural labours; their instructor working with them, and communicating information in the most affectionate manner: the girls proceeded to their sewing and domestic employments, under the Missionary sisters. They were afterwards at liberty, till the supper-bell rang, when we all sat down together to bread and milk, and various preparations of Indian corn; the Missionaries presiding at the different tables, and confining themselves, as is their custom except in case of sickness, to precisely the same food as the scholars. After supper, a chapter in the Bible was read, with Scott’s Practical Observations. This was followed by singing and prayer; and, then, all retired to their little rooms, in their log cabins.

“In the morning, at day-light, the boys were at their agriculture, and the girls at their domestic employments. About 7 o’clock we assembled for reading, singing, and prayer; and soon afterward for breakfast. After an interval for play, the school opened with prayer and singing, a chapter in the Bible, and examination on the subject of the chapter of the preceding day. The children then proceeded to reading, writing, accounts, and English Grammar, on a modification of the British system. The Instructors say they never knew white children learn with so much facility; and the specimens of writing exhibited unequivocal proofs of rapid progress. Many spoke English very well.

“The immediate object of the settlement of Elliot, is, the religious instruction of the Indians. The Mis-

sionaries are, however, aware that this must necessarily be preceded or accompanied by their civilization; and that mere preaching to the adult Indians, though partially beneficial to the present generation, would not probably be attended with any general, or permanent results. While, therefore, the religious interests of the children are the objects nearest to their hearts, they are anxious to put them in possession of those qualifications which may secure to them an important influence in the councils of their nation, and enable them gradually to induce their roaming brethren to abandon their erratic habits for the occupations of civilized life. The general feelings of the nation, at this moment are most auspicious to their undertaking. The community at large is most solicitous for civilization. In this they have made some progress; many of them growing cotton, and spinning, and weaving it into coarse clothing.

“Of the three districts or towns into which its 15 or 20,000 souls are divided, one has appropriated to the use of schools its annuity for seventeen years, of 2000 Dollars per annum, received from the United States for ceded lands; another, its annuity of 1000 Dollars per annum, with the prospect of 1000 more; and one has requested the United States, not only to forbid the introduction of ammunition into the nation, that the hunter may be compelled to work, but to send their annuity in implements of husbandry. At a recent General Council of the Chiefs, 1300 Dollars in money, and upwards of eighty cows and calves, were subscribed for the use of schools, and the total contribution of the Choctaws to this object exceeds 70,000 Dollars.

“I was highly gratified by my visit to Elliot—this

garden in a moral wilderness ; and was pleased with the opportunity of seeing a Missionary settlement in its infant state, before the wounds of recent separation from kindred and friends had ceased to bleed, and habit had rendered the Missionaries familiar with the peculiarities of their novel situation.

“ The sight of the children, also, many of them still in Indian costume, was most interesting. I could not help imagining, that, before me, might be some Alfred of this Western world, the future founder of Institutions which were to enlighten and civilize his country—some Choctaw Swartz, or Elliot, destined to disseminate the blessings of christianity, and refinement, from the Mississippi to the Pacific, from the Gulph of Mexico to the Frozen Sea. I contrasted them in their social, their moral, and their religious condition, with the straggling hunters, and their painted faces, who, occasionally stared through the windows ; or, with the half-naked savages of another tribe, whom we had seen in the forests a few nights before, dancing round their midnight fires, with their tomahawks, and scalping knives, rending the air with their fierce war-whoop, or making the woods thrill with their savage yells. But they form a yet stronger contrast with the poor Indians whom we had seen on the frontier—corrupted, degraded, and debased by their intercourse with English, Irish, or American Traders.”

I might, Sir, conduct you with our interesting traveller, from Elliot to Brainerd, and multiply quotations to the same general purport ; but, more than enough, I am sensible, has already been given, to convince a gentleman of your humanity and candour, not only, that the disinterested efforts which are now making to civilize and christianize the Indians of our

country, deserve not the opprobrium which is said to have been cast upon them, but, that they merit the approbation, and the support of the community. The present system of combining the two objects of civilizing and christianizing the Indian Tribes, is already “in the full tide of successful experiment ;” and, I cannot but deeply regret, that a measure should find its advocates in Congress, which appears to be calculated to give a powerful check, if not to erect an insurmountable barrier, to both.

Upon this country, Sir, rests a responsibility, in relation to the Indian Tribes, of deep and tremendous import. “Sovereigns from time immemorial of the interminable forests, which overshadow this vast Continent, this injured race have gradually been driven, by the white usurpers of their soil, within the limits of their present precarious possessions. One after another of their favourite rivers has been reluctantly abandoned, until the range of the hunter is bounded by lines prescribed by his invader, and the independence of the warrior is no more. Of the innumerable Tribes, which, a few centuries since, roamed, fearless and independent, in their native forests, how many have been swept into oblivion, and are with the generations before the flood! Of others, not a trace remains but in tradition, or in the person of some solitary wanderer, the last of his Tribe, who hovers like a ghost among the sepulchres of his fathers—a spark still faintly glimmering in the ashes of an extinguished race.” Alas ! Sir, shall the sword of avarice, or the strong arm of civilized power, still pursue this unhappy people ? Shall the unceasing and relentless force of emigration drive them from forest to forest, until the last remnant, struggling for existence,

shall fall on the verge of the Western Ocean, or perish in its flood ! Will not the voice of humanity prompt us to arrest this unremitting progress of extermination ? Does not the glory of our country require, that we extend to those who still survive, the hand of friendship, convey to them the blessings of social life, and raise them to a high and happy destiny ? And how, Sir, shall this be accomplished ? Break down the restrictions which have happily been placed upon Indian trade, and you will let loose upon the untutored tenants of the wilderness, a horde of selfish and unprincipled adventurers, to pollute, debase, deceive, and destroy. But, continue and enforce those restrictions—encourage and aid the Missionary Institutions of our country, and you will find a host of pious ministers, teachers, farmers, and mechanics, who will go forth to the work of civilizing the Indians, with no other motive than that of promoting their temporal and eternal benefit, and expecting and wishing no earthly remuneration for their privations and their toils. Adopt this course, and you will have Agents who will carry on the noble designs of the government in relation to the Indian Tribes, with a spirit of disinterestedness, perseverance, and fidelity, which, in any other way, or on any other principle, cannot be found. Adopt this course, and with cheering hope you may look forward to the period, when the savage shall be converted into the citizen ; when the hunter shall be changed to the agriculturalist or the mechanic ; when the farm, the workshop, the school-house, and the church, shall adorn every Indian village ; when the fruits of industry, good order, and sound morals, shall bless every Indian dwelling ; and when, throughout the vast range of country from the Mississippi to the

Pacific, the red man and the white man shall every where be found, mingling in the same pursuits, cherishing the same benevolent and friendly views, fellow-citizens of the same civil and religious community, and fellow-heirs to an eternal inheritance in the kingdom of glory.

I am, Sir, very respectfully, Your's, &c.

Z. LEWIS,

Domestic Secretary of the United Foreign Missionary Society.

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